

How to Make Progress in Polarized Times

A REFLECTION WORKBOOK



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About This Workbook

This workbook is designed to help you reflect on your role in today's polarized world and offers practical tools for making progress. It's not a deep dive into every cause of polarization, nor a checklist to "solve" it. Instead, you'll find research-backed strategies and tools to help navigate conversations and situations in polarized times and to build bridges across divides.

Though this workbook is not a summary of all depolarization methods, we humbly acknowledge the holes in geographic representation. Please reach out at info@apolitical.foundation if there are depolarizing experts or work you think we need to know about. We want to collaborate with and platform good ideas from around the world.

Workbook Goals



**UNDERSTAND
POLARIZATION AND
YOUR ROLE**



**EXPLORING VALUES AS
DRIVERS**



**TOOLS TO MAKE
PROGRESS**

Polarization and You

Polarization affects not only political systems but also our day-to-day interactions. **Affective polarization—also known as political polarization—** is the growing dislike or distrust of people simply because they hold differing political views. It's increasing worldwide, fueled by and impacting changing media, political, and societal landscapes. We all tend to think our opinions are objective facts and that people with differing political leanings are misinformed, bad thinkers, or brainwashed zombies. **The problem is, the people you disagree with think the same about you.**

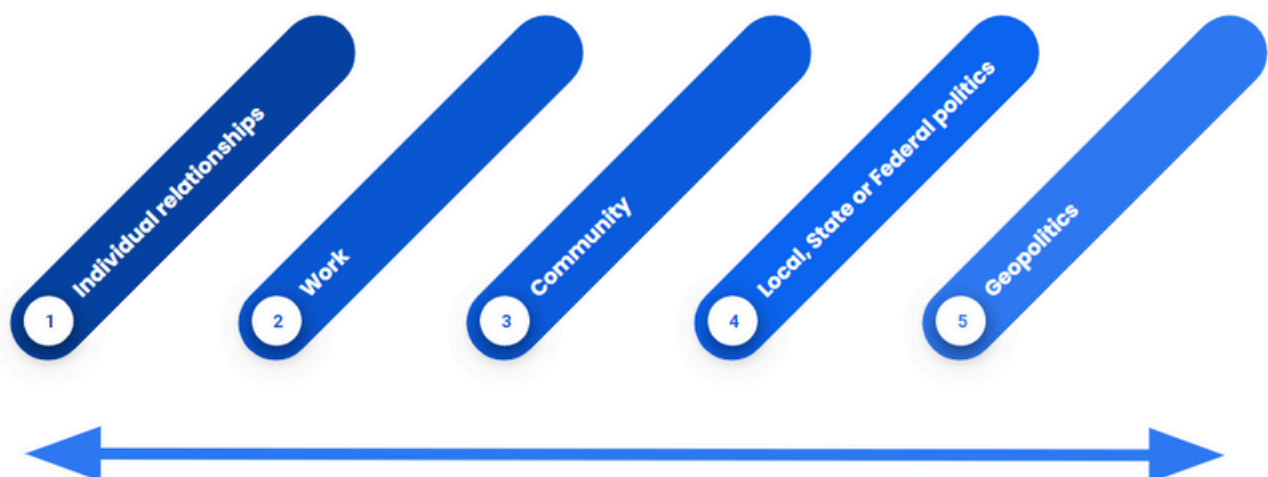


[I]n a pluralistic society, there is nothing like the undisputable public good; there is no objective definition of equity; policies that respond to social problems cannot be meaningfully correct or false; and it makes no sense to talk about "optimal solutions"...

Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber

In "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning," Policy Science, 4 (1973), 155

Where Polarization Is Experienced



Drivers of Polarization

Driving Factors

Value Conflicts	Cognitive Biases
Social Media	Traditional Media
Strong Identities	Inequalities
Change and Uncertainty	Overly Simplified Narratives
Information Abundance	Mis and Disinformation

More about Social Media

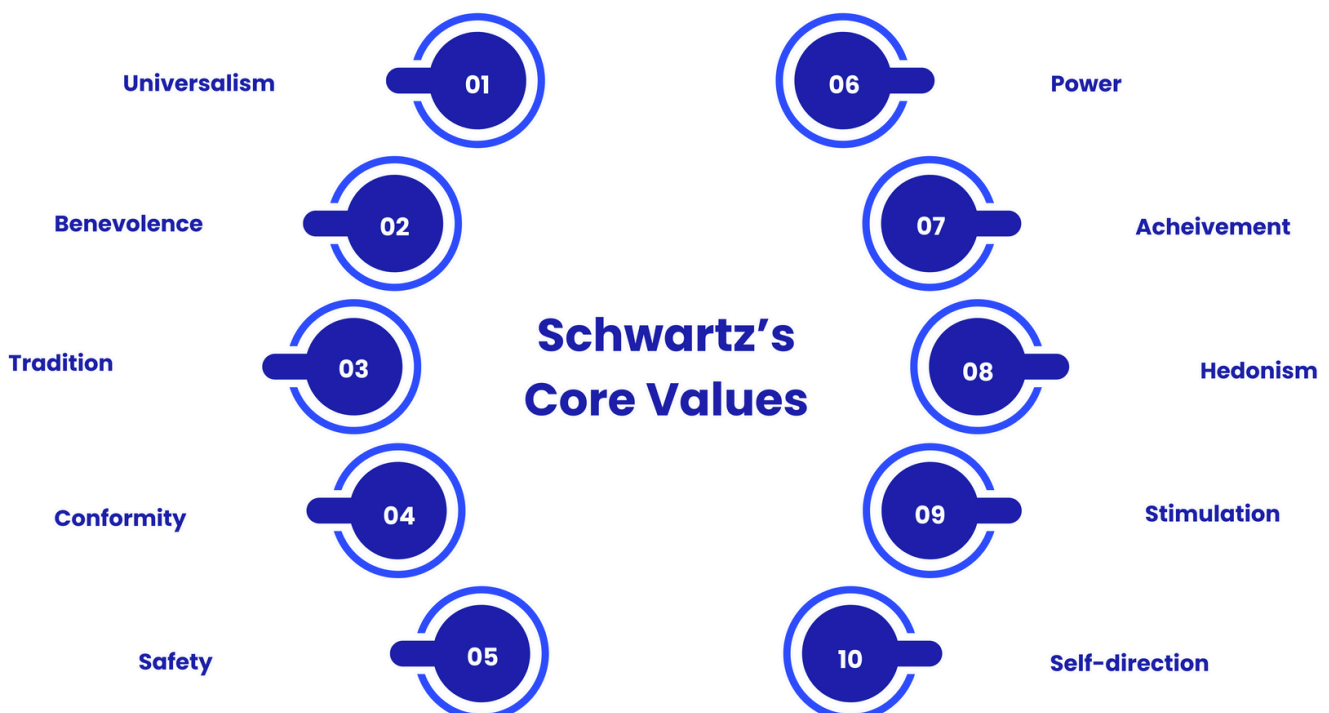
Polarization doesn't happen in a vacuum. Several factors contribute to the growing divide. New drivers may arise in the future. We hear a lot about social media in current discussions about polarization, but it's important to remember that political divisions and dangerous identity conflicts existed long before social media, or even the printing press.

Values and Polarization

At the heart our beliefs and how we act are fundamental or core human values. Understanding these different values can help explain why people become polarized. According to Professor S.H. Schwartz, there are 10 basic human values that almost all of us hold. It is our individual values hierarchies that can cause differences of opinion and drive affective polarization. When people prioritize different values, they may struggle to find common ground, making it challenging to engage in constructive dialogue.

Exercise

To explore your own fundamental values and how they influence your political and personal beliefs, complete this values test based on [Schwartz's portrait values](#). Write your results below.



Tools for Making Progress

In polarized times, making progress and engaging in conversations can be challenging. But with the right tools, you can move from divisiveness toward understanding.

“The Way Out”

Peter Coleman presents 10 steps as a “Way Out” of polarization. The Way Out website includes summaries of each chapter and free exercises for each step.

Here are some exercises from The Way Out that might help BEFORE you enter a difficult conversation.

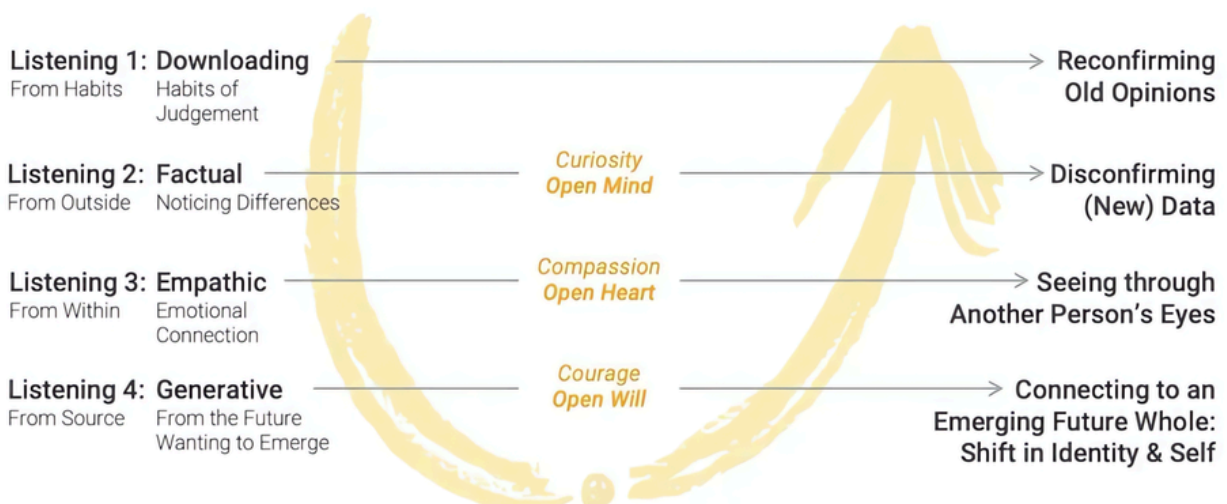
- [Why Am I Stuck? Political Polarization Self-Assessment](#)
- [Practicing Skills for the Way Out: Get Curious](#)
- [Brief Reflection on Your Theories of Conflict and Change](#)
- [Knowing Your Intentions: Debate Vs Dialogue](#)

Four Levels of Listening

Often we are listening, but on a shallow level. Otto Scharmer’s Four Levels of Listening describe “generative listening” as the deepest form.

A generative listener listens “for the highest future possibility to show up while holding a space for something new to be born”.

Watch: [Scharmer describes the levels of listening.](#)



Takeaways on Polarization and Personal Progress Plan

As you finish this workbook, here are the key points to remember and put into practice:

1. **Start with Self-Reflection.** Before engaging in difficult conversations, think about your role in polarization. How do your values and actions influence the divide? Understanding this is the first step to improving dialogue.
2. **Social Media Isn't the Cause.** Social media amplifies division, and is rightfully discussed in the public sphere. But polarization existed long before. The roots run deep down to our core values. It's important to focus on both societal and personal solutions.
3. **How you listen is critical.** Listen from outside of yourself and for the places from which new understandings, ideas, etc. can emerge.
4. **Focus on Shared Values When Communicating.** Conversations are more productive when you focus on the values you share, rather than trying to win an argument. This builds trust and can open people up to your point of view.

Personal Progress Plan

Self-reflection and productive communications are muscles that need to be trained and maintained.



Which situations in your life need these skills? Think about family, work, or community conversations where polarization is an issue.

About the Apolitical Foundation

The Apolitical Foundation is updating representative political leadership for the 21st century through a worldwide non-partisan movement. We envision a world in which political leaders are one of the most respected roles in society.

Our work falls into two streams:

1. Empowering excellence and better representation so upcoming and existing political leaders have the skills, knowledge, networks and reform ideas they need to deliver for democracy, people and the planet.
2. Partner to update the system so it is attractive, impactful, and sustainable to those who want to serve their communities through political leadership.

How You Can Engage With Us

- Explore [what we do](#), our [reports and toolkits](#) via our webpage.
- Partner with us! We love meeting likeminded people working to update political leadership. Reach out if you want to collaborate on new projects or workshops.
- Follow us on [LinkedIn](#) or [Instagram](#).

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